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Facebook: Teachers and Students

Article: <http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2012/06/social_media_in_schools_should_teachers_students_be_facebook_friends.html>   
  
 The popularity and use of social media has exploded in the past few years.  Sites like facebook and twitter host countless users, and are used by both adults and children.  Facebook is a great tool for communicating and keeping up with friends, but there are many ethical issues when talking about Facebook in the classroom.  
  
 Many teachers have or had webpages or wikispaces to post information like homework and study guides for their classes.  This is often looked at as a positive thing as the communication only goes one way, and no personal information is revealed.  Recently, in an effort to grab students attention, teachers have used Facebook as a place to post school related information.  In some cases, students have even friended their students and have conversations with them via the site.  
  
 Jeanette DeForge, author of the article “Social Media in schools: Should teachers and students be Facebook friends?” states that many schools do not have an official policy against preventing teachers from becoming friends with their students on Facebook.  Even though there may not be an official policy, many principals still ask or strongly discourage teachers from doing so, and recommend things like classroom webpages.  They claim that since teachers are held to such high standards, many seemingly benign  personal photos or posts can be offensive or seen as inappropriate.  Many teachers claim that using email as a way to communicate is also very effective, but teachers must still be cautious when taking this route as well.  It is recommended that when teachers do send out emails in class, they send them out in groups with multiple recipients.  The emails should also be strictly academic in context, however it can often be difficult to draw a line in this regard.  
  
 Kathryn Stead, an 11th grade British Literature teacher uses a site call weebly to create virtual rooms for the students to visit.  She claims that it is an effective way for students to meet and communicate.  Additionally, it does not provide any information about the teacher to the students.  
  
 When students inquire about being friends with a teacher on Facebook, it is best for the teacher just to explain that the relationship between a teacher and a student is friendly not friends.  Teachers aren’t friends with students in school, they shouldn’t be friends with students online.  Many principals claim that accepting the friendship can be a big regret down the line.  Douglas Arnold, the student services director for Holyoke says, “I tell teachers how dangerous Facebook can be.  You can go out to a wedding and share pictures of family, and kids are good at (Photoshop)”.    
  
 Teachers should also be aware of giving out their information unintentionaly.  A teacher from my school had her account ‘hacked’ one day last year.  One of the students in her room had stolen her phone for a few minutes, opened up her Facebook app, and friended himself.  The teacher did not find out until later.  The principal was notified and the students was punished.  
   
 The article does state that sometimes having a class facebook page can be very effective.  The teacher would create a profile and instead of putting personal information or a specific name, it could be called Penrose Room 6.  This page could not be public and would have to have strict security parameters.  I have personally seen this in my school.  At Penrose our school nurse is very active and interested in keeping up with the times.  He has created a facebook page called: Happy and Healthy Families at Penrose...where he posts nutritional and health updates, along with incentives to keep students interested.